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Dance, Organization, and Leadership

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The word *dance* does not only refer to an art form. It also refers to culturally shaped bodily practices, which have been used for a broad range of purposes from socialising to therapeutic exploration. Being at once art form, social practice, and tool for exploration and discovery, dance has many interesting applications in organizational development and organizational studies. We have been curious about the potential of dance and in this first special issue on this interdisciplinary topic we offer nine papers that work with the topics of dance, organisation and leadership.

The contributions go beyond the use of dance as a mere rhetorical and poetic label for various elements of leadership and change processes. Instead the notion of dance is used as a starting point for practical approaches and new theoretical ideas to leadership and organisation. We are delighted that the SI includes both academic and practitioner papers. We hope this will help ground this new field in the fertile interplay between practice and theory development. The topic has attracted contributions from researchers in organisation and leadership studies, who have made dance theories and methods part of their work, and from interdisciplinary scholars from the dance field. Several practitioners have used the opportunity to submit papers on the way they use dance as a training method in organisations. Even though they have successfully applied such methods for long periods they have not had the opportunity to report findings and reflections in a publication that concentrates on dance and organisation.

Our motivation for this first special issue on “dance and organisation” was the curiosity to develop research on aesthetics and organisations by including practice and theory on dance, and creating synergies between our different backgrounds.

Brigitte has published on theatre and organisations (e.g. Biehl-Missal, 2010, 2011) and came to consider dance (Biehl-Missal, 2015a, 2015b), as her academic background in Performance Studies overlaps with and includes many theories on dance and human movement. She found that these elements were largely neglected by other arts perspectives that focus on sculptures, paintings and texts.

Claus's scholarly interest lies within the fields of the use of art in management education and embodied cognition. Besides his academic work (Springborg and Ladkin, 2014; Springborg and Sutherland, 2014; Springborg, 2010, 2012, 2015), he works with dance (primarily tango and contact improvisation) and meditation techniques in which sensory experience plays a central part. He is interested in how the bodily, sensory experiences of engaging with dance and dance exercises offers very refined sensory templates, which can impact cognition and action related to areas beyond dance, e.g. leadership, followership, and seemingly unsolvable organizational problems.

Together, we coordinated the first stream on "dance, choreography and organisation" at the 2014 *Art of Management and Organisation Conference* at Copenhagen Business School in Denmark. At this stream, we had eleven paper presentations and practical sessions that explored, broadly speaking, embodied leadership, dance as an art-based approach to interaction in organisations, and the perception of rhythm and work. As a result of the positive experience and the enthusiasm for the topic that we felt, we proposed a special issue to develop a broader and firmer basis of this new research field in management and organisation studies. Most of the contributions were developed over the past year and constitute this special issue along with additional submissions.

We keep the ball rolling and invite submissions to our stream "Organizing Movement: On Dance, Sound, Embodied Cognition and Organizations" at the 8th *Art of Management and Organisation Conference* in Bled in 2016. The presentations will draw on, develop and extend research on dance and organisations that shows so many promising perspectives. Before we introduce the contributions of the SI, we shall provide an overview of the young stream of research in organisation studies that considers dance.

From art metaphors to dance metaphor and dance practice

The emerging interest in dance and organisation can be linked to the exploration of art metaphors that have been used as a heuristic tool in management research over the past decades. Many arts analogies have been applied to organisations, referring for example, to "organizations as theatre" (e.g. Mangham and Overington, 1987) where employees play their "roles" on a "stage" in front of "audiences". Similarly, organisations have been compared to jazz bands (e.g. Barrett, 2012) that improvise, communicate non-verbally and "swing" or "flow". Managers have been linked to all kinds of artists, from sculptors to painters and actors (Taylor and Hansen, 2005: 1219), which emphasises their creative and human-centred approach that goes beyond standardised rational routines of managing. Dance as metaphor for organisations is a more recent perspective and has only been marginally considered.

Several years ago, the 2008 EGOS conference theme "Beyond Waltz – Dances of Individuals and Organizations" used dance as a metaphor to reflect on a broad range of processes in organisations. Several works loosely refer to businesses being like a dance and Senge and colleagues (1999) for example have linked the notion of dance to corporate change that requires the ability to learn new "steps" and to "adapt attitudes" and practices. However, such metaphorical use of dance only draws on the very surface elements of dance. The metaphor can be expanded considerably and made much more interesting by referring in more detailed ways to dance theory and practice and the differences between various forms of dance. For example, dance has been used as a metaphor and heuristic device (Chandler, 2012) to make sense of dynamic forms of human interaction in organizations, pointing to the possible relevance of bodily movement, rhythm, themes and variations and non-verbal processes of leading and following. Similarly, Ropo and Sauer (2008) contrast practices of ballroom dancing and raving to explore the relationship between leadership and aesthetic experiences such as feelings of togetherness in dancing. Similarly, Johnson (2013) uses the Five Rhythms

dance practice (flowing, staccato, chaos, lyrical, and stillness) as the basis of distinguishing between five leadership styles. Denhardt and Denhardt (2006) examined in greater detail the ways in which the training and practice of dance artists can be an inspiration for leadership, also emphasizing aesthetic elements such as “rhythm”, “energy”, and “passion” and symbolic forms of expression that leaders need in the 21st-century business world. Bozic and Olsson (2013) has looked specifically at the working style of dancers and choreographers who improvise in dynamic situations with moving bodies to develop lessons for leadership practice.

In these examples, there is a movement from using the surface elements of dance to illustrate various points about leadership and organizations, towards using larger portions of the theory and practice of dance to develop theory and practice related to leadership and organizations. In doing so, it becomes more and more pertinent to have had concrete experiences of dance. The papers in this special issue have in common that they do not use dance as a superficial metaphor but as a starting point to explore all kinds of aesthetic and movement-related processes, embodied forms of agency, and tacit forms of knowing that inform leadership, followership and life in organisations.

Seizing the potential of dance to generate new insights into aesthetic aspects of organizational life and leadership, researchers and practitioners have increasingly resorted to actual dance and movement exercises for leadership development and data generation. Working with the body, these exercises address tacit and embodied forms of knowing and promise to generate academic data as well as enable new individual insights and understandings. In the broader context, we witness a growing practical interest in dance used as an arts-based intervention in organisations (Johansson Sköldborg et al., 2016) or as an arts-based tool for leadership development (Springborg and Sutherland, 2014; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). These approaches to dance make up a large part of the submissions we received for the special issue and which will be introduced in greater detail below, after a short reflection on the dance discipline.

Dance as a discipline

The emergence of the young area of “dance” in organisation studies and the practical application of dance in organisations is a logical continuation of both the general interest in art and organisations and an increasing scholarly interest in dance in other areas. As OS scholars may not be familiar with dance studies, we give a brief introduction to this field and its relationships to other fields of study.

Both choreographed and improvised forms of dance and the process of developing dance performances have attracted increasing attention of scholars in many disciplines. In recent times, cognitive science, psychotherapy, robotics engineering and medicine have drawn on theories and concepts from dance studies to explore human movement and embodied social interaction. Performance studies, anthropology, gender studies and cultural studies have a longer relation to dance studies. They have pushed the boundaries of the discipline to consider dance as a culturally shaped bodily practice, which expresses and also transforms socio-cultural contexts. An example for a classic work is Desmond’s (1997) “meaning in motion”. Dance scholars as well came to define dance as a socio-cultural practice, focusing on questions of agency articulated in specific choreographic practices of communities, groups and subjects. Contemporary choreography thrives beyond the art world in an ever-expanding field of applications, including scholarly and political contexts (Butterworth and Wildschut, 2009), as well as individual self-exploration (Klein et al., 2011). While some scholars still marvel the beauty of dancing bodies without taking into account the critical potential of art/dance, there is a pragmatic turn in dance studies not to decode artworks but consider social practices and also focus on the aesthetic experience (Siegmond, 2013; Foster, 2011).

This links very well to aesthetic approaches in management studies that have considered many aesthetic phenomena and arts-based approaches over the past decades but have only marginally explored dance.

Dance as an academic discipline, mostly offered through the arts and humanities programmes in Higher Education institutions, is among the young academic disciplines. It has emerged from, and often is a part of performance studies. However, just like the discipline of theatre studies, which grew out of literature studies, is primarily concerned with the impact of the "performed" text instead of the literary characteristics of the written text, so dance studies to an even higher degree places emphasis on performance and movement. Human movement's fugitive nature makes its scholarly exploration particularly challenging. This has impeded the development of dance studies into a discipline in its own right (Butterworth and Wildshut 2013: 6). Other elements that have challenged the development of the dance discipline include the ephemerality and transience of dance as a phenomenon, little documentation, and a low social status that goes along with a perception of dance as a "female art". Furthermore, the body plays a central role in dance, and Western dualism has privileged the cognitive over the corporeal. Thus, in the management field, we have witnessed a rejection of aesthetic approaches to organisations, while "intellectual" and quantitative approaches dominate. The emergence of the organisational aesthetics field (Taylor and Hansen, 2005) over the past decades has paved the way for dance studies' inclusion into management studies. Dance studies are a promising addition to management and organisational research because it provides concepts and research methods to further explore the aesthetic and transitory nature of organisations.

Content of the special issue

Dance as a *research method* has been used to develop and to communicate new theories within a broad range of academic fields ranging from physics to biology to social science ([TED talk with John Bohannon](#)). Dance has also been used as a research method to generate data, whereby the body is viewed as an experiential repository for what we "know", which may emerge through dance (Leavy, 2009). In this spirit, Anneli Hujala, Sanna Laulainen, Riitta-Liisa Kinni, Kaija Kokkonen, Katja Puttonen, and Anniina Aunola explore dance-based approaches in their article "Dancing with the bosses: Creative movement as a method". Adopting a phenomenological and auto-ethnographic approach, they apply dance as a research method to study leader-follower interaction, adding personal colour drawings to illustrate the paper. The authors also find that through the aesthetic experience of dancing they gained a different form of embodied understanding of their own roles as followers and for their experience in embodied interaction.

In her invited commentary, "Ode to choreography", Katrin Kolo discusses different perspectives on choreography that open up various avenues for organisational research. Choreography is considered beyond the notation of dance "as design of the perception of movement and time and space" that also involves constant "decision making". This also leads to an understanding of social choreographies that describe the art of moving and the art of living together, with other people and objects in spaces. In this view, the aesthetic organisation of society also is choreographed. To understand these often implicit choreographies, Kolo draws on dance as a research method, harnessing dance for bodily exploration rather than verbal discussions by "moving" words (through the body) and "translating" these moves.

The aesthetic experience of individuals' existence in organisations has also been approached by Ralf Wetzal and Nathalie Van Renterghem in their article "How to access organizational informality: Using movement improvisation to address embodied organizational knowledge."

Conceiving of the body as a repository of knowledge, the authors employ movement analysis to video recordings that draws on frameworks used in dance studies. Participants' bodily movements are a source to generate data on their experiences when being exposed to different management styles and to formal and informal ways of communication.

Using a different aesthetic method of visual analysis in combination with in-depth interviews, Suvi Satama in her article "Feathers on fire: A study of the interplay between passion and vulnerability in dance" immersed herself in moments of action of professional dancers to explore embodied and sensory aspects of work, and how these have an impact on actions and interactions of organizational agents. Satama thereby demonstrates the potential of the world of dance as a site of extreme bodily work, emotions and pain, desire and weakness, showing that this is a productive field to generate new insights into embodied agency that we find in comparable forms in today's organisations.

Dance as a *training method*: Several of the contributions in this SI focus on the use of dance exercises in leadership development. Many of the authors of these papers are both dance practitioners and leadership developers and they write about their experiences of including dance exercises in their leadership development courses. In general, these papers propose what can be learned when using dance as metaphor for leadership practice, when we potentiate this use of dance by starting from concrete experiences of dance exercises – rather than from what leaders already know (or think they know) about dance. We (the editors) asked these authors to include rather detailed descriptions of the exercises they use and the corresponding learnings they would typically see emerge in participants. We believe that this is very valuable to grow this part of the field of dance and organization.

Claus Springborg and Ian Sutherland in their article "Teaching MBAs aesthetic agency through dance" provide a strong theoretical basis for the application of dance exercises. Building on Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge and on simulation theories from the branch of Neuroscience known as embodied cognition, they discuss the potential of movement exercises to create the sensory experiences, which in turn can be appropriated to achieve skilful knowing and doing related to managerial work. Furthermore, they caution that unreflected use of reflective conversations may hinder – rather than facilitate – the learning, which can come from engaging with dance exercises.

Fides Matzdorf and Ramen Sen in their paper "Demanding followers, empowered leaders: dance as an 'embodied metaphor' for leader-follower-ship" use dance sport and ballroom dance as an analogy for leadership and add aesthetic depth and detail by bringing in their embodied knowing of the matter. They show that leadership and followership are relational and are negotiated in embodied dynamics. Going beyond the mere re-labeling of leadership "as dance", Matzdorf and Sen use dance as a medium to explore leadership, drawing on their personal experience as professional dancers. Demonstrating that dancing can provide a vehicle for new insights into leading and following through embodied understanding, they continue dance's historic tradition as a medium through which social, spiritual, and political contexts are explored.

In their article "Dancing lessons for leaders: Experiencing the artistic mindset", Mark Powell and Jonathan Gifford write about a larger leadership development program, which included sessions with dance exercises. The exercises were used to facilitate learning at a physical level about a number of concepts relevant to managers. Thus, they use the dance exercises to explore various kinds of *connection* between people using physical touch as well as visual connection. They also look at the embarrassment managers sometimes feel relating to such connection. They also used dance exercises to explore the importance of *allowed leadership* and to illustrate the difference between technical perfect performances and artistry and why

technical perfection is not enough. Furthermore they explore *trust*, how good but *ego* driven individual performances can spoil the collective performance, and the importance of paying attention to *inputs*, not merely to *outputs*.

Daniel Ludevig in his contribution "Using embodied knowledge to unlock innovation, creativity and intelligence in businesses" reports insights from dance exercises and refers to social presencing theatre and Otto Scharmer's Theory U. This contribution shows again that dance is a "universal language" that can be used in multi-cultural groups and in any other organisation. The exercises function as a gateway to embodied and tacit understandings, helping participants to sense through the body. They realize that the body is much more than "a brain taxi", but a medium that enables an understanding of what happens in tacit ways between leaders and followers, at the margins of groups as well as in the creative whole of diverse groups. The choreographies of the exercises help to better see and sense group dynamics, for example when a group tends to keep close or to shepherd individuals in space, a practice that can engender a discussion of general leadership practices that may suppress individual exploration and inhibit innovation.

David Zeitner, Nicholas Rowe, and Brad Jackson in their article "Embodied and embodied Leadership: Experiential learning in dance and leadership education" have interviewed dance as well as leadership scholars and dance practitioners on dance as a learning method. They discuss existing practices and further theoretical ideas about the use of dance in leadership education. The notion of "embodied leadership" is used to express a sense of how individuals can physically, not visually, imagine an organizational future – whereby embodied leadership focuses on embodied knowing of the present and past.

Directions for future research: dance and gender, space, and sound

With regard to the broad field of cultural studies research, in this editorial we seize the opportunity to build further links for future research on dance and organisation. This special issue does for example not include pieces with a primary focus on *gender* and movement in organisation and leadership, but refers to gendered norms of leading and following in dance practice such as ballroom dancing (Matzdorf and Sen, this issue) and to gendered movements in ballet where female dancers may be carried like "chickens" (Satama, this issue). Given the large body of cultural studies research on gender and movement, we wish to draw some attention to this aspect. Dance studies have deconstructed the category of "woman", discussing that movement is a large factor of influence in the construction of gender (Desmond, 1997). Young (1990) in her study "Throwing like a girl" considers movement patterns that are part of those structures and conditions that define the feminine. These practices have so far only been discussed briefly in the management field (Biehl-Missal, 2015a: 190-192), developing studies on gender in management that understand gender as a social practice that is exposed to many tacit practices and biases in organisations (Fotaki, 2011). Dance Studies helps build new theory on the gender-specific embodiment of leadership and aesthetic perception of leadership, and these insights can also be used in leadership development with dance-based methods.

Another contribution from dance research to organisational studies is the development of *literature on organisational space*. While the issue of movement in space has not been featured in the SI, an inclusion of dance theory to develop this literature seems logical. Organisational space has been viewed not just as functional or symbolic, but also as a vehicle of aesthetic experience (Dale and Burrell 2008). While the embodied and affective nature of everyday "performing" of organisational space has been considered in this context, people's movement-based interaction in a space, the so-called kinaesthetic interaction, needs further

exploration. Dance theory and literature on site-specific dance (Kloetzel and Pavlik, 2009) seems to be a promising interdisciplinary addition in this context.

Human movement, like dance, is influenced by *sound*. We see as an avenue for future research the consideration of sound and its impact on bodies in different contexts. There have been some attempts to de-silence organisational research (Corbett, 2003) and the latest research on sound emphasises the vibrational force and affective tonality (Goodman, 2012). Studies on sound and leadership also include the example of conductors (Koivunen and Wennes, 2011). A consideration of music, not reduced to lyrics, but as a collectively engineered vibration can develop our understanding of movement-related, kinaesthetic interconnections within organisations – being a topic that we have included in the second stream on “dance and organization” at AoMO 2016.

Reflections on the cover

The two people on the cover are Claus Springborg and Mette Munk Andresen. Mette is a tango dancer and a co-founder and leader of the M2tango studio in Copenhagen. Mette and Claus are collaborating on various art-projects (e.g. Dance a Poem - <http://www.danceapoem.com/>), as teachers of tango, and as facilitators of management education through dance. In their artistic process they often begin by defining very strict limits and then using play to find as much freedom within those limits as possible. They do not work to directly illustrate or explore particular ideas, concepts, or themes. Rather they cultivate receptivity to the atmospheres, which comes out of their play and they then follow and develop these atmospheres. Concepts or themes may be included as a background, as something, which may colour what comes out of the play. Claus and Mette believe that allowing themes to colour the creative play, rather than trying to express or explore already formulated opinions or perceptions of the theme, will bring forth more interesting and unpredictable expressions of the theme.

For the cover, the limits were that the picture should include at least one chair (given the tradition of the OA covers), that both dancers should be in the picture, that the picture should be of a steady pose (the picture was taken using a remote-controlled camera), and that the poses and the appearance of the dancers should be non-gendered, i.e. no traditional tango cloth and no traditional dance embraces. The theme of dance, organization, and leadership was only present in the dancers’ awareness in so far that they knew they were working to produce a cover picture for the special issue on this topic. This brought forth a picture with sufficient openness and ambiguity to be used by any viewer for a contemplative dialogue on the theme of leadership. You can see Claus and Mette’s explorations of the tango vocabulary [here](#).

Concluding remarks

Looking across the nine articles, we see a trend in organisational theory and interdisciplinary practice that parallels other developments in the organisational aesthetics field and further fuels aesthetic and arts-based inquiry. Intellectual academic inquires concerned with art metaphors that re-label organisational practice has broadened and has come to focus on the actual aesthetic exchange. While the dance metaphor has been around for a more than a decade as a mere analogy (e.g. Senge et al., 1999) and still colloquially is used in such a way, recent studies has come to see organizational life as an aesthetic and movement-related practice. These papers consider social practices such as leadership as being built on structures of embodiment. This does not mainly involve linking the display of bodily motion to the articulation of social categories of identity, but considering the aesthetic impact of bodily movements. What all these different approaches share is a focus on embodied and tacit forms

of knowing that are altered and enhanced through the medium of dance. This is taken further by the practical, arts-based approach that uses dance in organisations. With the inclusion of dance practice and of dance practitioners in the conversation, the field is becoming much more substantial.

The dance perspective has a particular strength and potential for exploring dynamic 21st century organisations and leadership. The transitory and ephemeral nature of dance is not only a challenge for academic studies of dance but also a particular asset in times of constant change. Scholars in dance studies have emphasised the potential of the discipline with regard to change that is the central paradigm for modern times (Klein, 2009). Also organisations, like dance, are constantly changing. Movements not only produce structures that are fleeting, but movements permanently create, perform and transform structures. Dance brings into our perception the constant co-creation and decline of these structures, for example in leader-follower-relationships, and points to the many possibilities that reside in these constant collective negotiations, alterations and creations. In this sense, dance – more than other arts perspectives – bears a strong idealistic moment. So we are very happy to present this first special issue to you that hopefully will spark your theoretical, practical, and critical interest in this new topic.

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Brigitte Biehl-Missal – professor for business communications with a focus on public relations, journalism and business studies, at BSP Business School Berlin, in Germany. Her teaching and research is largely informed by her background in theatre, film and media studies and her interest in innovative forms that broaden and challenge traditional management approaches. Her research focuses on art, aesthetics and organisations as well as on artistic practices in the world of performance and music. She has published in the *Journal of Management Studies*; *Culture and Organization*; *Consumption, Markets & Culture*; *Leadership*; and others, and is currently working on a book *Dance and Organisation* to be published by Routledge in 2016/2017.

Claus Springborg – Owner and founder of CoCreation, a provider of managerial development workshops and programs, and an international teacher of tango, contact improvisation, and of meditation. He did his doctoral work on art-based methods in management education at Cranfield School of Management. His research interests include art, embodied cognition/neuroscience, and managerial development. In his work with managers, he blends his research findings with his experience as a dancer, musician, and as meditation teacher. His research has been published in *Leadership*, *Organizational Aesthetics*, and in the book *The Physicality of Leadership*. He is reviewer for *Leadership*, *Management Learning*, *Organizational Aesthetics*, *International Small Business Journal*, and other academic journals. His meditation teachers include Velusia Van Horssen, Faisal Muqaddam, Claudio Naranjo, and Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche.